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ABSTRACT

It is suggested that correctional educational programs for adults must be designed in such a manner as to rehabilitate the many who are presently incarcerated and prevent many potential perpetrators from ever engaging in crime. The continually increasing problem of overcrowding in prisons throughout the country has made the need for relevant and effective rehabilitation programs even more critical. During the decade ahead, programs for all adults, prisoners notwithstanding, must be geared toward obtaining an improved set of job skills and, perhaps more important, improved attitudes toward the whole concept of the work ethic. New technologies must be considered, and microcomputers are no exception. Where microcomputers are unavailable, instructors can still teach basic computer literacy concepts. In addition, cooperative private business and educational institutions in many areas are subcontracting with rehabilitation programs to increase first-hand contact with computers. Increased first-hand prisoner contact with microcomputers could also be obtained through some system of sentencing reform in which nonviolent offenders would be given varying amounts of mobility in the community. (MN)

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TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

CORRECTIONAL EDUCATION: Methods and Practices in the Computer Age

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Today the whole society of America is deeply involved with its reliance on microcomputers, what they can do for people and to people.

The myth and fear exerted a decade ago that computers would totally replace the thought process of human kind but that has not come to pass as many advocates seemed so certain it would.

It seems fair and reasonable that we as adult educators at this stage in history must carefully analyze what we can anticipate and then devote more of our time and talent exploring ways to cope with the problems in our respective areas of expertise during this computer age.

Since we can not at this session cover all areas of adult education and adult needs, let us limit our analysis to those professionals who deal to a great extent with programs designed to improve correctional education in our nation.

A BRIEF OVERVIEW

In order to place our thoughts on the same level of analysis let us take a moment to consider some of the basic factors which are at play in our own U.S.A.

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First on a positive note, the whole world has acknowledged that during 1984 general crime in the U.S. has declined. This is indeed a change. We can hope that a new trend is developing and that somehow our efforts in adult education are beginning to bear good fruit. Even if this were true, we can not stop for one moment but rather need to exert all efforts possible to minister to the needs of those many adults who are searching for ways to express themselves to society.

A second and less positive note from the past is that according to the U.S. Department of Justice (June 19, 1984), the number of inmates increased at an unbelievable rate from 1977 to 1983. In round numbers the total was only about 100,000 in 1977, increasing to almost 500,000 in 1983.

A further comparison shows a fantastic increase in expenditures by state correctional systems during the same period. In 1977 the expenditures totalled about $2.5 billion but had increased to $6 billion by 1983.

Crowded conditions seem to exist in prisons throughout the land. Local jails are full and overflowing. About 7000 waited for placement in the prison system in 1977, while this number had risen to 10,000 waiting for prison admission by 1983. So local jails are simply overflowing! Such conditions existed in eight states in 1977, but had spread to over twenty states in 1983.

Since we are looking at the national figures, let us take a brief look at what regions of the U.S. are experiencing these

changes. This can be expressed by showing the percentage increase of state prison population for 1983.

They are as follows:

The South	3% increase
North Central region	3.9% increase
North East region	9.1% increase
West	12.8% increase

With this overview let us turn our attention to exploring ways which will help those who are presently in the penal system and particularly to programs which will help prevent further crime and further imprisonment.

New and Exciting Programs for Adults

It seems clear that programs for all adults during the decade ahead must be geared toward obtaining an improved set of job skills but perhaps more importantly an improved attitude toward the whole concept of the work ethic.

Work assignments need not be synonymous with boredom. If properly approached, the time which adults of any age or status spend to gain job skills can be a time filled with excitement and happiness.

New technologies must be considered at this point. Microcomputers are no exception! They can be a tremendous aid to adult instruction. First we have two levels to deal with before any clear cut results will be produced. The teacher for the most part must become aquainted with the idea of how and what computers can do. This perhaps is the major step and in many

instances may not directly involve the adult students except in a secondary manner. For example, many ABE students and most incarcerated adults will have little if any access to practice with the hardware. This does not mean that the teacher can not "teach about" the value of the computer and its application and its influence on home life.

In situations where the microcomputer is available in corrections classroom there are numerous ways to stimulate both teachers and students by looking at both software and hardware. With only a minimum degree of accomplishment a new outlook on learning can be created. Many halfway houses are now attempting to secure computers in order to show newly released inmates how they can learn skills wanted by employers. Consequently a small investment in computers can become a great help in rehabilitation.

Cooperative private business and educational institutions are sub-contracting with rehabilitation programs to increase first hand contact with computers. This type of training can be of extensive value in helping incarcerated or recently incarcerated adults to gain job skills and improve their chances of gaining early employment when released.

Critical Issues and Concerns of Correctional Adult Educators

To illustrate this point let us examine one midwestern state which committed 3395 adults to prison in 1983. Of this number 1910 were convicted of non-violent crimes, 228 were drug violators and the balance of 1257 were committed for violent

crimes. During the same time on a national basis however the serious crimes have declined about 7 percent. Yet during the last year some 24000 prisoners were added to the state and federal prison system.

Prison facilities are over crowded in most states and new cells costs from $25,000 to $100,000 each. Operating costs are another expenditure ranging from $7,000 to $30.000 per inmate per year.

One major question which seems to abound everywhere is: Can we "build" ourselves out of the over crowded position where the incarcerated adult is now housed?

It seems clear, during this decade of computerization, that incarceration as the primary method of adult punishment has no measurable impact on crime rate. As objective adult educators we are now forced to look for other methods and alternatives of dealing with the adult problems. Many are beginning to look anew at sentencing reform.

The sentencing reform concept does appear to have merit. The alternative program stresses accountability to the offender, to the victim and to the state.

The correctional system in turn is accountable to the criminal justice system and to the entire public interest.

The range of restriction of the offender would be on continuum ranging from 100% unrestricted mobility through some 10 to 12 levels of accountability. The most restricted level would of course be 100% incarcerated in a maximum security prison and the least having full mobility at the community level.

Summary

As adult educators explore these issues in correctional education it becomes increasingly clear that there is truly a national problem in our correctional institutions today. There are vast differences in opinion as to how adults can and should be serviced educationally in order to prepare, update, and maintain themselves in a productive role in American society.

There is sanction to the proposition that recidivism can be significantly reduced if the proper amount of vocational and humanizing skills can be taught to the incarcerated offenders.

There is a growing concern that the number of offenders can be reduced provided home and day care centers furnish an atmosphere where job skills are taught and responsibility is practiced as a part of every day development. The present state of technological development in the U. S., and its probably exponential growth during the next decade, makes it imperative for adult educators to employ all methods possible to improve instruction. This means much more reliance on the microcomputer on the part of both teachers and students.

This instructional need is equally applicable to the majority of incarcerated adults as well as those in many rehabilitation centers.

Adult Basic Education and GED enrollees can likewise profit greatly by having better facilities and more personalized instruction on both process and content.

Alternatives to traditional imprisonment for many non-violent offenders seems to be gaining rapidly in popularity.

Consequently more and better instructional techniques should be used to assist adults in training or retraining for productive employment.

Researchers have much proof that correctional educational programs which provide positive self-concept and adequate job skills during this computer age will do much to prevent crimes and reduce the over crowded prisons which are far too prevalent in our nation today.

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